

Rubella (German measles)

What is rubella?

Rubella is a viral disease characterized by slight fever, rash and swollen glands. Most cases are mild.

Who gets rubella?

In unvaccinated populations, rubella is primarily a childhood disease. Where children are well immunized, adolescent and adult infections become more evident. Rubella occurs more frequently in winter and spring.

How is rubella spread?

Rubella is spread by direct contact with nasal or throat secretions of infected individuals.

What are the symptoms of rubella?

Rubella is a mild illness which may present few or no symptoms. Symptoms may include a rash, slight fever, joint aches, headache, discomfort, runny nose and reddened eyes. The lymph nodes just behind the ears and at the back of the neck may swell, causing some soreness and/or pain. The rash, which may be itchy, first appears on the face and progresses from head to foot, lasting about three days. As many as half of all rubella cases occur without a rash.

How soon do symptoms appear?

The incubation period for rubella is 12-23 days; in most cases, symptoms appear within 16-18 days.

When and for how long is a person able to spread rubella?

Rubella may be transmitted from seven days before to seven days after rash onset.

Does past infection with rubella make a person immune?

Yes. Immunity acquired after contracting the disease is usually permanent.

What is the vaccine for rubella?

Rubella vaccine is given on or after a child's first birthday, and is usually given in combination with measles and mumps (MMR) vaccine. Children usually receive the first dose between 12 and 15 months of age and the second dose prior to school entry at four to six years of age.

What can be the effect of not being immunized against rubella?

Rubella infection is dangerous because of its ability to damage an unborn baby. Infection of a pregnant woman may result in a miscarriage, stillbirth or the birth of an infant with abnormalities which may include deafness, cataracts, heart defects, liver and spleen damage and mental retardation. Congenital rubella syndrome (CRS) occurs among at least 25 percent of infants born to women who have had rubella during the first trimester of pregnancy.

What can be done to prevent the spread of rubella?

Maintaining high levels of rubella immunization in the community is critical to controlling the spread. Control of the spread of rubella is needed primarily to prevent the birth defects caused by CRS. Therefore, women of childbearing age should have their immunity determined and receive rubella vaccine if needed. Infected children should not attend school during their infectious period.

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Taken from New York State Department of Health Communicable Disease Fact Sheets.